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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the history and development of a program of college preparation and language study for Spanish speakers at Canada College in Redwood City, California. The first step was to draw the local Spanish-speaking population to the college; this was done through a Latin festival. The second step, an assessment of educational needs, resulted in an ESL program designed specifically for Spanish speakers. Following the success of this program, courses were established which could be taught bilingually or in Spanish. Further curriculum innovations included secretarial courses and Spanish for Spanish speakers. Plans for the future include bilingual/bicultural teacher training and vocational training. (AM)

CANADA COLLEGE'S ENGLISH INSTITUTE:

A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS

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Cañada College sits serenely atop a hill among the olive trees on an old Spanish land grant about half-way between San Francisco and San Jose. From one side the college overlooks the recently-completed Junipero Serra Freeway and Woodside, one of the Peninsula's more affluent suburbs. From the other side the college overlooks San Francisco Bay and the baylands, where industry, salt ponds, and suburban settlements edge the Bayshore Freeway.

Opened in 1968 to meet the educational needs of southern San Mateo County, Cañada now forms part of the tri-college San Mateo Community College District: College of San Mateo (est. 1922); Cañada College in Redwood City; and Skyline College (est. 1970) just south of San Francisco in San Bruno.

Although Cañada draws a few of its students from the affluent hillside homes near the college, the bulk of the students reside in the more bourgeois suburbs of San Carlos, Redwood City, and Menlo Park. The college also draws a number of minority students, particularly from heavily Black-populated East Palo Alto.

Even though Redwood City, Cañada's largest feeder population, has a significant and growing Latin American colony, very few Spanish-surnamed students were finding their way to Cañada's hilltop until 1973, when the college initiated a special college preparation and language study program for Spanish speakers. The history and development of this new program is, I believe, important, and worth sharing with other community college teachers and administrators, not only to stress concerns for the education of California's largest minority group, but also to show that significant changes in attitudes and programs can be brought about with a positive commitment on the part of a college that works closely with the local community. A brief look at Cañada's program for Spanish speakers may also provide some insights into how one college has retooled to meet the needs of the "new student" during a period of rapidly-changing student population.

At the outset it should be made clear that Cañada College, in its first five years of operation (1968-73), had done little in the way of curriculum innovation to encourage Spanish-speaking students to take advantage of its various educational programs. Indeed, it almost seemed as if the curriculum were designed to discourage Latinos from attending--by slight rather than by intention--particularly immigrants whose English language skills were limited. Cañada did manage to draw a few Mexican students for its championship soccer teams, however, and there were, of course, several ethnic offerings dealing with Mexican-American sociology and even Mexican-American literature, but these were designed for students who were fluent in English and who could

hold their own in reading and writing. The English as a second language courses--one in English, the other in speech-communications--were clearly not meeting the needs of recent immigrants from Latin America, primarily because these ESL courses (really EFL--English as a foreign language) had been designed for foreign students on visas, most of whom had relatively strong educational background and whose screening had shown their English to be sufficient to profit from instruction in it. A few Spanish-speaking immigrants trickled into these EFL classes, as well as into other remedial reading, writing, and math courses, but few lasted the first semester.

There were, we estimated, literally hundreds of Spanish-speaking persons of college age in the community who ought to be interested in Cañada's varied vocational and transfer programs. Indeed, although the latest Redwood City census (Special Census, 1969) showed only a 5% Spanish-surnamed population, Redwood City School District reported in 1973 that more than 17% of its pupils were Spanish-surnamed. Either the city census was wrong or the Chicanos were having Chicanitos at over three times the rate of the rest of the population. Actually, a little of both seems likely. For whatever the reasons, while the local elementary schools were running over with Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Latinos, their brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, and parents were clearly not finding their way to the community college. Maybe they didn't even know that we existed.

The first step in changing the college's poor, or non-existent, image among La Raza was to invite them to visit the campus. In 1971 Gil de la Rocha, a Chicano counselor, hit upon the idea of involving the college and the Chicano community in a Saturday field day at Cañada, really an open house and Latin festival to celebrate Cinco de Mayo. Mariachi music, folk dances, a soccer game between Cañada College and a top Latino team, a queen contest, Mexican food, piñatas, theatrical presentations, and a gala evening dance were part of the festivities, which brought hundreds of Spanish-speaking residents and their children to the college, people who had never before been near it, the barrio being located miles away in the lowlands to the south of downtown Redwood City. The college community pitched in to organize the fiesta along with local organizations and Cinco de Mayo Saturday turned out so successful that it has been held every year since, to larger and larger numbers of people, Anglos as well as Latinos. La Raza had found us at last, or perhaps the college had found La Raza.

Our next step was to assess educational needs. The existing courses had singled out Latino immigrants for failure and we assumed that the problem was basically linguistic in nature. Either Cañada must (1) begin to teach courses using Spanish as the language of instruction or (2) bring the language skills of the students up to a level where they could profit from instruction in English. Interestingly, after various consultations between college and community representatives, both of these occurred: Cañada became bilingual.

The first curricular thrust was to prescribe English as a second language courses as a cure for English language deficiency, courses which would deal with the actual language barriers faced by Spanish-speaking immigrants. Working closely with the Dean of Instruction and the Chairman of the English and Foreign Languages Division (now Interim President Robert Stiff), Gil de la Rocha and I proposed an intensive English as a Second Language Program designed specifically for Spanish speakers. The Chicano community's reception to this idea was enthusiastic. Dubbed by Gil "El Instituto de Ingles," Cañada's English Institute opened its doors to the first students in the fall of 1973, with Gil serving as Director and I and two other Cañada teachers as staff, plus a tiny cadre of instructional aides and student assistants.

It soon became clear that our original projections for a pilot group of thirty students had underestimated the interest: we finally had to close down registration when we passed seventy students. While immigrants from Mexico were by far the largest group, we also registered students from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Puerto Rico, plus one U. S. citizen who had been born in Texas, but raised in Mexico. The majority of the students had immigrated during the past five years, with a few having arrived in California as recently as six months or less ago. However, quite a few students had been in this country longer than five years, some more than ten years, and one longer than twenty years.

The students registered for the following coordinated curriculum, offered during the morning and early afternoon hours:

English 57A: English as a Second Language (5 hours weekly)

Speech-Communications 57A: Speech for Foreign Students (3 hours weekly)

English 67: Reading Laboratory (5 hours weekly)

English 68: Writing Laboratory (3 hours weekly)

Guidance 10: College Orientation (2 hours weekly; taught in Spanish)

With such a varied pattern of immigration, problems were apparent from the beginning. Obviously, the students were at extremes in their English abilities, some quite good, others with little or no English. They were also at extremes in their educational backgrounds, some with only a third or fourth grade education, others with high school and even university degrees from Latin America. Our resources as a true "community" college were going to be put to the test by this group of varied--yet similar--students, all with a desire to improve their English and thus their educational and vocational potentials. The English and Foreign Languages Division was also weakly staffed to teach these students: I was the only instructor with ESL training and experience; only two of us were bilingual in English and Spanish; and there was a definite lack of Chicano/Latino models. Transportation was also a problem for many students since the college was not served by public transportation. Nevertheless, students managed to get to class, often in car pools and by picking up carless classmates.

In spite of these initial problems, the first semester of the Institute turned out remarkably well. The students did not drop out, at least not any more than students in other programs, and not one student quit because of dissatisfaction with the program. The usual reasons for dropping out were economic, e. g. a work shift was changed or a student had to go to work full time. Indeed, the Institute students formed quite a spirited and cohesive group on campus, which brought a considerably heightened awareness of La Raza students and their needs on the part of the college faculty at large. In spite of a lack of funding or planned budget, and thus nothing in the way of special equipment or materials, the Institute staff rallied together with enthusiasm and professional zeal to become rapidly knowledgeable in teaching ESL and even to design and produce special instructional materials, including five pre-vocational ESL units to interest Institute students in Cañada's vocational programs.

Not only did the majority of the students return for the second semester, but many of them felt confident enough in their English to register for classes outside of the Institute. And they brought their friends and relatives with them, so that English Institute classes have remained overflowing. At the end of our first year of operation, thirty students received certificates of completion; in 1974-75 over eighty students were registered at the beginning of the academic year. Tutorial services have also been expanded to the point that each student has a tutor available for outside help several hours minimum per week.

The second curricular innovation was to establish courses which could be taught bilingually or entirely in Spanish. During the second semester, advanced Institute students were encouraged to take History of Latin America, taught bilingually, mainly in English but with explanations in Spanish from time to time. Although a few students found the English lectures and reading too difficult, the majority successfully completed this transitional course. Many of these students are currently enrolled in vocational and pre-professional programs. In 1974 the Business Department added Spanish Typewriting, taught bilingually, and a course in Spanish shorthand is being considered, which would make the clear beginning of a Spanish-English bilingual secretarial program. In addition, the Foreign Language Department will offer Spanish for Spanish Speakers in 1975, a course which will fit not only into bilingual secretarial training, but which will also be valuable in the training of teachers aides who will work in bilingual-bicultural education programs in the elementary and secondary schools. A number of Chicano and immigrant students have expressed interest in this Spanish language course, especially those who did not complete their secondary education in Latin America. The college believes that these individuals have a basic right to learn to read and write their native language which, according to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, has equal status in California with English.

The English Institute has also brought about a small person-to-person program on campus, in which Anglo students of the Spanish language alternately exchange practice in English with practice in Spanish on a one-to-one basis

with Institute students. Cañada's Spanish teachers have been enthusiastic and cooperative in helping to establish this bilingual student exchange.

As a response to public demand, community courses taught in Spanish in the evening at the newly-opened Fair Oaks Community Center, in the heart of the Redwood City barrio, have received wide community interest and are well attended. Two courses offered during the fall of 1974 were "Community Health," taught by registered nurse Manuela Cortez, and "Community Awareness: You, the Police, and Your Rights," taught by Oakland policewoman Haydee Chavez.

Other future vocational and career programs for Spanish-speaking students are now part of Cañada's master plan. The next thrust, depending on available funding, will likely be in the area of bilingual-crosscultural teacher assistant training, which will enable Spanish-speaking students to work as teacher aides in bilingual education programs in local schools or to continue on to a state university for the Bilingual-Crosscultural Specialist Credential.

In a period of a year and a half, then, through the efforts of a few concerned staff members, a cooperative administration, and an involved local community, Cañada College's complexion has changed from a mainly Anglo monocultural institution to a more multi-ethnic, multicultural institution, where Spanish-speaking students of various educational backgrounds have found not only a welcome, but also a solid college preparation program for developing their linguistic, educational, and vocational-economic potentials. The "Invisible Minority" of a few years back has suddenly become highly visible at Cañada College.